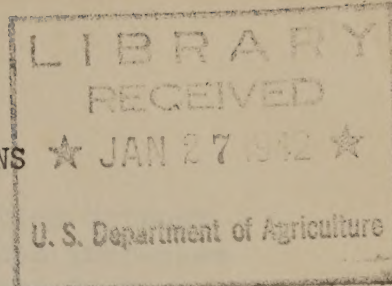


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

PRELIMINARY POPULATION ANALYSIS - NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS
1930-1940



Population trends in the Northern Great Plains, between 1930 and 1940, have been characterized by net losses on farms, large gains in places of more than 2,500, slightly smaller gains in places of less than 2,500, gains in the western part of the area, and losses in the central and eastern counties. The farm population declined a total of 268,563 persons, or 16.3 percent, decreasing from 1,650,946 in 1930 to 1,382,383 in 1940. The farm population decreased its percentage of the total population from 47.0 percent in 1930 to 40.5 percent in 1940.

In an area so predominantly agricultural as the Northern Great Plains, such a decline in farm population, taking place at the same time as villages and cities are increasing, raises some significant questions. Are farm families moving to or living in towns, and operating their farms from there? Is industry attracting population to the villages and cities, or are these places continuing to hold population mainly because of public-assistance funds of various kinds? What will this mean in the future? Will the nonfarm residents move away as chances for employment develop elsewhere? Is the migration from farms removing so many younger persons that enough will not remain to replace the older ones as they pass on?

The area as a whole lost 103,900 persons, or 3.0 percent, declining from a population of 3,514,828 in 1930 to 3,410,928 in 1940. The two western States of the area each showed gains; Wyoming had an increase of 11.2 percent and Montana increased by 4.1 percent. South Dakota had the largest decrease, 7.2 percent, followed by North Dakota with 5.7 and Nebraska with 4.5 percent. In absolute numbers Nebraska showed the greatest decrease in population, 62,129 persons, followed by South Dakota with 49,888 and North Dakota with 38,910. Wyoming had the greatest increase in absolute numbers, showing an increase of 25,177 persons, and Montana had 21,850.

A large decrease in farm population, and a small increase in incorporated places of less than 2,500, resulted in a total decrease of 9.1 percent in rural population, decreasing 231,717 persons, from 2,533,375 in 1930 to 2,301,658 in 1940. South Dakota had the largest decrease in rural population, 13.7 percent, with North Dakota and Nebraska each reporting a decrease of 10.1 percent. Montana decreased 2.4 percent, while Wyoming showed the only increase in rural population, 1.1 percent. Urban population for the area showed a sizeable increase of 13.0 percent. The urban population as a whole increased 127,817 persons, from 981,453 in 1930 to 1,109,270 in 1940. Every State in the Northern Great Plains area showed an increase in urban population: Wyoming 33.5 percent, South Dakota 20.8 percent, Montana 16.8 percent, North Dakota 16.4 percent, and Nebraska 5.8 percent. The largest absolute gain in urban population was reported in Montana, with 30,499 persons, followed closely by 20,041 in Nebraska and 27,180 in South Dakota. Wyoming and North Dakota reported gains of 23,480 and 18,617, respectively. In absolute numbers Wyoming is the only State reporting an increase in rural population, an increase of 1,697. Losses are as follows: Nebraska 90,170, South Dakota 77,068, North Dakota 57,527, and Montana 8,649.

Only 77 of the 294 counties in the area gained in population between 1930 and 1940. About three-fourths of all counties in Wyoming had increases in population, whereas at the other extreme only one-eighth of the South Dakota counties had increases. Three counties in Wyoming and two in Montana increased their population by 40 percent or more. These five counties are all in the western part of the area. On the other hand, Garfield, Petroleum, and Prairie Counties in Montana, and Armstrong County in South Dakota, lost more than one-third of their population between 1930 and 1940. These counties are in the eastern part of Montana and central South Dakota - each of them had a small population in 1930.

Nine counties in the area had gains in excess of 5,000 persons in absolute numbers. Three of these nine counties, Douglas County, Nebr., Minnehaha County, S. Dak., and Laramie County, Wyo., include large cities, and their gains are due mostly to the increases in these cities. Missoula and Yellowstone Counties, Mont., and Scotts Bluff County, Nebr., had cities in excess of 10,000 persons in 1940, and the gains can partly be attributed to the gains of these cities. Flathead County, Mont., Lawrence County, S. Dak., and Fremont County, Wyo., each increased their population more than 5,000 persons in absolute numbers. All these nine counties had a city of 5,000 or more in 1940. Douglas County, Nebr., which includes Omaha, largest city in the area, had the largest absolute gain, which was 14,580.

Seven counties in the area showed losses in excess of 3,000 persons in absolute numbers. These counties are scattered throughout the Northern Great Plains. Silver Bow County, Mont., reports the largest loss - 3,762; this loss can be attributed partly to the loss in metropolitan Butte. Of the remaining six counties, Custer County, Nebr., Williams County, N. Dak., and Beadle County, S. Dak., report an urban population, while Clay County, Nebr., Mountrail County, N. Dak., and Charles Mix County, S. Dak., have no incorporated places greater than 2,500.

In an area where the birth rates are constantly in excess of the death rates, the losses in population are necessarily the result of a net out-migration. Most of the counties, and many of the towns, must have sent forth a considerable volume of population. The area had a natural increase which would have made for a population gain of about 350,000 by 1940, without migration. The fact that it lost 103,900 persons during the decade indicates that there must have been a net migration from the area by close to 455,000, or about one-eighth as many people as were there in 1930. Apparently no net migration to or from Wyoming took place during the period from 1930 to 1940. A preliminary estimate would indicate that both North and South Dakota lost about one-fifth as many people as they had in 1930, as a result of net out-migration. Most of the counties and many of the towns, especially those under 2,500, must have lost a considerable volume of population. A preliminary estimate of net migration from Nebraska is not less than 174,000, or one-eighth as many people as there were in 1930. This represents the largest out-migration for any State in the area in absolute numbers. Montana had more births than deaths, so its population should have increased by at least 43,000 between 1930 and 1940. The fact that it increased by only half that amount indicates that the net migration from the State was at least 21,000 for the decade.

Twenty of the 26 cities that were over 10,000 in both years showed gains, and three more cities entered this category - Laramie and Sheridan, Wyo., and Scotts Bluff, Nebr. Total population of cities of 10,000 and over for both years showed an increase of 8.5 percent. Billings, Mont., with an increase of 42.0 percent, had the greatest gain for cities of 10,000 and over both in 1930 and 1940, while Bismarck, N. Dak., followed closely with a 39.7 percent increase. Scotts Bluff, Nebr., which entered the group of 10,000 and over from 1930 to 1940, had the remarkable gain of 42.4 percent. In absolute numbers Omaha, with a gain of 9,838, had the largest increase. Anaconda and Butte, Mont., with losses of 11.9 and 6.2, respectively, had the greatest decline in the 10,000 or over group. In absolute numbers the same two cities had the biggest losses, with Butte reporting a loss of 2,451 and Anaconda 1,490. Forty-five of the 56 towns from 2,500 to 10,000 in both years gained in population, and 17 others grew from less than to more than 2,500 since 1930. Towns which were from 2,500 to 10,000 in both years showed a total increase of 10.1 percent during the 10-year period. Only three towns fell from above to below the 2,500 mark. The incorporated villages which were under 2,500 in both years showed an increase of 5.2 percent.

It is of some interest to note the development of county seats. Twenty-five out of the 26 cities of 10,000 or more for both years are county seats, and these had a gain of 8.7 percent. Norfolk, Madison Co., Nebr., is the only city in this category that is not a county-seat town, and it declined in population by 2.1 percent. Two of the three towns that increased from below to above 10,000 in the 10-year period are county seats, and they increased by 23.4 percent; Scotts Bluff, Nebr., is the town in this group that is not a county-seat town. Forty-eight of the 56 cities of 2,500 to 10,000 in both years were county seats and had a gain of 9.2 percent; the entire group gained 10.1 percent. Sixteen of the 17 cities which grew from less than to more than 2,500 were county seats and had a gain of 44.0 percent. Two out of the three towns that decreased from above to below 2,500 during the 10-year period were county seats and decreased by 9.9 percent. Among the places of less than 2,500 for both years, the county seats increased more rapidly than the entire group under 2,500. The county-seat group gained 14.7 percent, while the entire group of incorporated places below 2,500 in 1930 and 1940 gained only 5.2 percent. Altogether, county seats increased by 10.8 percent, while all incorporated places gained only 8.2 percent. The county seats of the following counties are not incorporated, and therefore are not included in these figures: Arthur, Banner, Blaine, and McPherson Counties in Nebraska; Armstrong, Buffalo, Harding, Perkins, Shannon, Todd, Washabaugh, and Washington Counties in South Dakota; Billings, Dunn, McKenzie, and Sioux Counties in North Dakota; and Garfield, Mineral, and Powder River Counties in Montana.

Table 1.-Changes in population of rural and urban areas of Northern Great Plains,
1930 - 1940

	Population		Changes 1930 - 1940		
	1930	1940	Gain or		:
			loss	Amount	Percent
Total for area	3,514,828	3,410,928	Loss	-103,900	-3.0
Cities which were 10,000 and over in 1930 and 1940	690,873	749,649	Gain	58,776	8.5
Cities which grow from less than to more than 10,000	25,610	33,213	Gain	7,603	29.7
Cities which were 2,500 to 10,000 in 1930 and 1940	253,898	279,486	Gain	25,588	10.1
Cities which grew from less to more than 2,500	32,423	46,922	Gain	14,499	44.7
Cities which declined from more than to less than 2,500	8,059	7,304	Loss	-755	-9.4
Other incorporated places (includes only those in- corporated in 1930)	634,664	662,399	Gain	27,735	5.2
Total for incorporated places	1,645,527	1,778,973	Gain	134,956	8.2
Total for unincorporated rural areas (includes farms)	1,865,826	1,624,557	Loss	-241,269	-12.9
Total for farm population	1,650,946	1,382,383	Loss	-268,563	-16.3

Table 1. Changes in population of rural and urban areas of Northern Great Plains, 1930 - 1940

Total for rural places		Total for urban places		Total for nonincorporated places		Total for incorporated places		Total for nonincorporated places (includes rural areas)		Total for incorporated places (includes urban areas)	
1930	1940	1930	1940	1930	1940	1930	1940	1930	1940	1930	1940
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323
Total for rural places											
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323
Total for urban places											
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323
Total for nonincorporated places											
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323
Total for incorporated places											
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323
Total for nonincorporated places (includes rural areas)											
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323
Total for incorporated places (includes urban areas)											
1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323	1,314,323	1,314,323	5,410,323	5,410,323